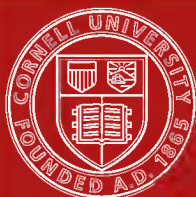




The
Lagoon
of
Desire

W. F. Alder



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THE LAGOON OF DESIRE

BY
W. F. ALDER

AUTHOR OF
"THE FLYING FOX"—"THE HOUSE UNBLESSED"
"FANGS OF THE BLUE"—"THE INDEX ERROR",
"THE ISLE OF VANISHING MEN"
ETC.

WITH ILLUSTRATIONS

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"Steve saw red"—

Isle of beauty, laved by southern seas—
Thy coral reefs with stately palm trees
dressed;
Within thy arms a clear lagoon reflects
The smile of heaven, and Desire is blessed.

—*Dayton.*



HE last strains of a dance number floated from the ballroom of The "Europe." On the veranda at the tables, white shirt fronts, pink shoulders, the babble of small talk and two men in earnest conversation.

Across the tennis greens beyond the sea wall, the roadstead of Singapore with the blinking ship's lights of a dozen nations. There was no moon. In the murk of the distance, the waters of the harbor were as placid as a nun's face.

Idly swinging on her anchor chains, the "Sayonara" nuzzled the sluggish tide. Leaning flaccidly upon her rail was a spare figure in dungarees. In the light of day, his face spoke of an eternal quest, of a haunting memory that, when his searching eyes groped far behind yours, was questioning. This was Steve.

Screened from the open door of the ball room

by a corpulent, potted cyprus, unmindful of the vapid generalities and small talk drifting from the other tables sat Markham and—Blackton. Markham, thin almost to emaciation, his snow white hair tumbled in becoming riot, was speaking.

“You say you can go anywhere in the ‘Sayonara.’ That may be very true but is she fast?” Blackton smiled.

“There isn’t anything in these waters that depends on the wind that can pass her,” he replied.

“If we can agree on price, I’ll take her charter for two months.”

“That depends on where you’re going and what you’re going after,” said Blackton.

“Well, Captain Blackton there is only one way in which I will charter your schooner. That is simply this,—You are to sail her according to my directions to a certain coral island and ask no questions regarding my purpose. I will take the responsibility for the safety of the boat in

the island waters for I know them well. I am going to this island after certain property that is of great value to me, the loss of which has occasioned me much trouble. I am an ex-sea captain and I know the value of things. You say you carry a crew of five lascars, a white mate and that the boat is a sixty tonner. I'll pay you three thousand dollars Strait's currency a month for the charter. Take it or leave it."

Blackton leaned back in his chair to think. The price offered was a fair one. It was even generous. Then his crafty brain fell to wondering what the something was, that could bring a man of Markham's age clear from San Francisco to Singapore, to go to a coral island a month's sail farther on. He decided to fence a little to elicit further information.

"Suppose we run into a British patrol boat?" he queried. Markham flushed with annoyance.

"Do I look like a blackguard?" he snapped.

"No offense, Mr. Markham, but you understand that I don't know you any more than you

know me. You're asking a lot in this charter."

Ral Singh, the Sikh doorman passed at that moment. His quick ear caught the last words that Blackton uttered—"You're asking a lot in this charter." Ral's brother worked on the water front where strange tales were told of many mysterious goings and comings of the *Sayonara*. It was whispered among the Malays that, could the planks of the staunch little schooner speak,—well, men had seen dark stains upon her decks. Her white mate and her present crew were all new on board. The others had not come back to Singapore. Ral Singh murmured to himself—"Beware Sahib, *Itu Orang tida biak*" (That is a bad man.)

Markham looked at Blackton with quiet insistence.

"Do I get the charter or not?"

"Will you pay the insurance?" asked Blackton.

"Yes."

“All right, we’ll make out the papers tomorrow.”

“When can you sail?”

“As soon as you sign the charter and I get my harbor clearance.”

“Very well, we shall leave the day after tomorrow.”

Rising, Markham concluded the talk with “See me here tomorrow at ten—we’ll conclude the business then.”

A rickshaw carried Blackton to the point on the bund where just opposite the Sayonara, the dinghy lay. As he paid the coolie, the two lascars that had been awaiting him, untied the boat from the piling and waited with oars ready. He was taken to the Sayonara where the figure was still hanging over the rail.

“Better turn in and get some sleep”—was his greeting to Steve. “This ketch pulls out of here day after tomorrow, and I want her cleaned up starting early in the morning. You give me the ‘willies’ anyway, always mooning around. You

stare at every man you see like he was a lost brother—a brother that you had a grudge against. Come out of it.” So saying, Blackton went to his cabin and turned in.

Steve did not deign to make reply. The only sound that came from where he stood was the stuttering gurgle of his briar. It was a very good briar. On it's bowl were carved some class numerals. It was a relic of former days: Days not so long ago, when things had been different.

Men around the water front of Singapore had long ago given up trying to add Steve up. In the parlance of the habitues of the bund he was a “Nut”. Morose, given to hours of stolid taciturnity and furtive study of those around him who had the smack of the sea, he impressed the less discerning of the water front crowd as a police agent. Those who had discernment were too busy in their own affairs to notice him. The time had come when his money gave out and he was forced to seek work. Blackton, arriving short handed from the Indies, offered him a job

for he held a mate's ticket. Blackton hired him because of his apparent lack of interest in what was going on about him. He liked to have men around him that didn't see too much and that minded their own business.

The formalities of the charter concluded, Blackton awaited the coming of Markham on the sailing day. Markham had not mentioned Lois as a passenger, and when she came aboard, Blackton gave her a swift appraising glance and mentally congratulated himself, anticipating more or less entertainment during the voyage. Lois was good to look upon. In the middle twenties, clear of eye, wholly unspoiled by that air of laxity and ultra Bohemianism affected by Blackton's female acquaintances, she swung over the low rail and with a level glance at Blackton said:

“Has all the luggage come?”

He caught the level glance and answered, “Yes.”

With the word his eyes dropped to survey her.

It was that kind of a look that brought the color to her face for under it she felt utterly nude.

It was her first experience with a hunter of women and under it something changed within her. Intuitively the warning came, to fear that man, that cannot turn his eyes to those of woman and keep them there.

With the wisdom of many conquests, Blackton sought to cover himself for he realized that here was different stock than the painted ones of the hotels of Singapore.

“I assume you are Mrs. Markham?”

“No, Miss Markham,” she replied a little tartly.

“I might have known that by the way you got over that rail” he said, “I’ll have a boy show you your cabin.”

“Boy!”

* * * * *

An hour later Markham came aboard. Under his arm he carried a worn portfolio. With a nod to the captain he went below to his tiny

cabin, and soon the *Sayonara* was under way.

Night had fallen when they passed quarantine island. Lois and her father sat in silence in their wicker chairs back of the after cabin. They were alone on the deck for Blackton was busy in his cabin. The lilting air of "Peggy Brady" drifted aft from the favorite lounging place of Steve. Hopelessly addicted to the mouth organ, he sat slumped against the mast, braced against the motion of the *Sayonara* by limbs spread at an impossible angle. It was his tribute to the night, and too, one often suspected him of having, well—memories.

The velvet blackness of the "Coal Pit," the ebon depths of which open from the silver arch of the Milky Way made a background for a dream picture of—a memory, and Steve gazing, wrapt in fancies, let fall the beloved harmonica, lost in reverie.

His face drew with a wince of pain. He turned. There, burning in the blackness of the tropic moonless sky, he saw the Southern Cross.

He too, bore a Cross and like the one above, it was a broken kite.

His head drooped, one hand stole up, knuckles to his lips. The fist closed slowly, hardening as teeth met flesh and left their mark. Groping by his side, the other hand found the old harmonica, closed quickly on it, and raised it to the other. Softly first, then swelling with his feeling, came "The Rosary," plaintively sweet and like a choir invisible.

As the last sweet note hovered on the wings of the light night wind, a cloud, black as the night itself, blotted out the Cross. Steve rose, and slapping the harmonica across his open palm, looked once more at the blackness, then, unconscious of the lascar at the wheel, went to his cabin. His, was the early morning watch.

Lifting her head to the lazy swells, the Sayonara winged her silent way to find a golden fleece, her wake a sparkling silver pathway in the blackness.

“Who is that man, father?” whispered Lois as he went below.

“His name is Steve,” he answered.

* * * * *

Two bells. In the east now comes a line where sky and sea meet. A faint glow tinges the low hanging clouds. A molten mound lifts from the water's edge, tipping the crests of the breeze awakened sea with gold.

A restless sea of sapphire with a lane of topaz, the natal greeting of a new day.

Came a stirring from the cabin, a petulant “Pshaw” accompanied with the clatter of a basin falling—footsteps, then, breaking like the day itself from the cabin door stepped Lois.

“Good morning, Steve.”

“Good morning, Miss Markham.”

“Oh, what a morning,”—this to herself, then, “Where are we now Steve, how many more days will it be? I'm hungry, I wish Dad would get up.” Steve grinned. Volley firing was a characteristic of Lois' conversation.

“Well, we’re just about on the Line, that’s Black Island over there. I don’t know how many more days we will be, but if the wind holds steady and that glass—(pointing to the aneroid hanging on the bulkhead) don’t keep on dropping, and the skipper finds the place, I calculate that we might be in soon, but I’d know better if I knew just where we’re going. You see, Miss Markham, the skipper ain’t never taken the trouble to tell his first officer where he’s shipped for.”

Lois looked at Steve in surprise.

“Don’t you know where we are going Steve?”

“Honest Injun, Miss, all I know is that I’m steering South 20 West this watch and that’s all.”

Lois stopped to think, a thing that she was fully capable of doing. Stepping nearer to him, one hand on the cabin deck combing to steady herself, she opened her lips to speak.

“Lois!”

The thin voice came from the open saloon transom.

“Yes Dad.”

“Come and help me with my things for a moment.”

With a look of perplexity clouding her face, she went below. Scratching his head with a pensive forefinger, Steve glanced into the binnacle and gave the *Sayonara* two points.

“It’s a queer run this,” soliloquized Steve. “The old gentleman looking at the ‘blue backs’ (Admiralty Charts) all day, the skipper never giving me a hint as to where we’re going and passing it off when I ask him.” Steve paused a moment, lost in thought. “I wonder if——, Lord! Maybe—— Well, I’ll wait and see.”

A thumping of boots interrupted further thought along these lines and with a curt “Stir up the cookee,” punctuated with a nod aft, the skipper took the wheel. Passed two weeks, ’neath azure skies, on a sea that kissed the stem of the *Sayonara* with smothered weeping.

It was middle forenoon. Curled up in the shade of the after deck house, Lois day-dreamed in a steamer chair.

The frequent advances Blackton made to her were received with cold disdain, for ever recurrent in her memory was the manner of their first meeting and his appraising look.

Blackton noted Lois' lack of occupation and hoping to break the bar of her reserve, went to his cabin. He returned shortly with an armful of books which he took to her saying,

"Life upon a sailing schooner has it's dull moments, Miss Markham. Here are some books with which you can put in the time." He laid them on the chair at her feet. Lois raised up on her elbow and thanked him without warmth. Her eyes scanned the titles.

"I don't know much about what is in them for I don't get much time to read, you may find them interesting however." As Lois made no reply he colored slightly and turned slowly away.

"Thank you Captain Blackton," she said

again, "I will look them over." So saying, Lois gathered the books into her lap. Opening one of them at the fly leaf she read, scrawled boldly across it's white surface, the words "Gloria Maitland."

Something that she did not sense, some intangible prompting held her eyes upon that name. It became indelibly impressed upon her memory. After another moment's gaze her eyes lost their focus upon the sheet though she still dimly saw it. In her fixed abstraction she seemed to look through it and beyond. Through her consciousness drifted some sense of familiarity with that name. It seemed as though she had heard it or perhaps read it before and she racked her memory to recall the connection. Intuitively the feeling came that though she could not place it, it had or was to have, some place, some bearing upon her life. She shrugged her shoulders in her perplexity and turned to the first chapter.

Lois ate her luncheon on deck, the book in one

hand, eating with the other. Late that afternoon she had finished the last chapter. She sat silent for a moment lost in thought about the story, then the name on the fly leaf came to her. Somehow there seemed to be a bond, a tenuous something linking her to that name. A nameless oppression gripped her. It was as though the girl who had written her name upon that leaf were trying to speak to her.

The coming of Steve on deck roused her from her thoughts. As he passed her, he noted the expression of wrapt concentration on her face.

“Didn’t it end well?” he asked. Lois looked up at him and smiled. “Oh yes” she replied, “It was something else, I was—” then with the thought that Steve might think her foolish should she attempt to explain, she passed the matter off with, “I was thinking of something else.” Steve grinned and made his way forward.

Farther down the deck sitting in a Bombay chair, poreing over an old and tattered chart,

one thin blue veined hand holding his gold pince nez, sat Markham. Now and then lost in abstraction, his gaze would wander from the chart and center on the horizon or far beyond. At such times his cavernous eyes would fill with poignant hunger and his sensitive lips would form silent words and tremble. Then doubt would shadow the fine face, and he would take from the black leather portfolio, a worn and frayed manuscript, turn hastily to some passage, often consulting the charts during it's perusal.

For hours daily, since leaving Singapore, he had done this, though now of late becoming restless with suppressed emotion. This day, after some calculation, and the taking of sights for position, he called the skipper to him, and in the manner of one consumed with impatience, though holding it in check, said, "We anchor tomorrow. Hold your present course, the next island we come to is our destination."

The skipper without answering for a moment, leaned over to look at the chart, but with a

frown, and a movement so quick that Blackton drew back in surprise, Markham rolled the chart.

“You agreed to let me lay the course and figure all positions. Do you remember?” said Markham.

The skipper nodded, then, after a momentary pause said angrily:

“Well, look here, Markham, I think it’s about time you told me something about this game. Insurance is all right, but it only covers the boat. It doesn’t cover my loss of time waiting to have another built. I’m not going to have the Sayonara piled on a reef in these God-forsaken waters.”

Steve looked aft from the wheel at this, his face a picture, commenting to himself—“Well, I’ll be damned.”

“Blackton, I covered the schooner for all they’d put on her, you know that, also you forget that I know these waters. You agreed to sail her on my reckoning. The terms of the charter are

very clear on that point. Further, my desire to visit this island is of concern to no one but myself. The box I left there is of great—” here Markham hesitated, then rapidly continued, “value to myself, but valueless to others. I have very good reasons to hide the identity of this island until such time as I recover the box and restore it’s contents to the rightful owner.”

“It’s just as I thought” was Blackton’s mental comment, “I’m going to learn a little more about that box.” His face lost it’s look of anger, an expression of disinterest supplanting it.

Markham continued. He misread Blackton’s face.

“Captain Blackton, my advice is to get every knot possible out of the Sayonara before ten tomorrow, for the island is surrounded by a reef of coral, and passing the entrance to the shelter of the bay is ticklish business in a blow. Once inside the bay or lagoon the boat will be safe in any ordinary storm. The glass has been acting

queerly for two weeks. Tonight, we will have weather, if I be any judge."

"It was that that worried me just now," replied Blackton, and he glanced around the horizon, sniffing as he did so.

"It will be more than wind I think," said Markham.

"I was thinking too," resumed Blackton for he glimpsed Lois under the after awning playing with the cat, "that a storm in these waters would not be a pleasant experience for your daughter. I have her to worry about as well as the boat,—a passenger in my care."

"Don't worry about me, Captain Blackton, I'll be well taken care of," called Lois. Blackton looked at her in surprise at being heard, answering:

"No doubt of that, Miss Markham," and he smiled. It was a smile that might have meant several things.

* * * * *

Steve's watch. With the evening breeze came

vague whisperings. The reef-lines on the main-sail tapped a warning, for the sky ahead and on both quarters was of leaden gray.

Sitting near him, hair in what she termed a fright, was Lois in a deck chair. Twice she opened her lips to speak to him, and thought better of it. Finally, after the vessel had slowly righted down from the pressure of an unusually stiff gust, she leaned forward and in a voice carefully modulated so as not to reach the skipper further down the deck, said "Steve, I'm worried."

"T'won't be much of a blow, Miss Markham," he answered, "We'll just catch the tail end of it."

Her tone became more serious.

"It isn't that I mean, Steve, it's something else I don't know how to express." She paused, then as though with mind decided, "Steve, have you a sister?"

Steve nearly dropped the wheel.

“Yes, Miss Markham, that is— I had one once.”

A wistful look crept into his face. Noting his expression, her intuition telling her that here was something very wrong, she rose and went to him, laying a soft hand upon his arm.

“I didn’t mean to hurt you, Steve, I’m sorry. Tonight when you are off watch, I want to tell you something, or perhaps ask something of you. Will you help me if I need you?”

A sixth sense told Blackton that he was missing something. He was too late to catch the hand upon Steve’s arm, but he caught the apparent friendship in their manner, and that the couple had something in common. Lois had never evinced the slightest desire to converse with him, and he was somewhat piqued at her aloofness, biding his time, however. Just at this moment it was apparent to him that Lois was making the advances, which to Blackton meant only one thing,—personal interest. His face suffused with anger, mixed with covert curiosity.

Steve, he deprecated, for to him Steve typified bland rusticity. But the girl?— He eyed her in callous appraisal. He watched them in silence, his tongue moistening his lower lip the while.

“I sure will help you if you need me, Miss Markham,” replied Steve.

Thanking him only with a look, Lois turned to go below. Blackton’s look of anger turned to one of covetousness as her lithe figure passed him by the transom. He watched her down the steps, then glancing around the deck to see if Markham were near, rose and strode to the wheel.

“Well, ‘Cupid’, is the love affair coming on nicely?”

Steve turned in surprise and colored to the roots of his hair. He was startled into incoherency.

“Why, I— What do you mean Captain?”

Blackton laughed coarsely then, with face hardening, and in a tone of not to be thwarted assurance, he playfully patted Steve upon the

arm saying, "Look here, Son, as a Lothario, you're a wooden Buddah," then the hand tightened on Steve's arm, "If there's any love making done on this ketch, I'm going to be the one that does it, understand? Take my advice and lay off the lady, don't let a rank amateur's bungling disconcert the lady when there's an expert around." He nudged Steve in the ribs as he said it, then his voice roughened.

"Remember what I've said, young fellow, I never allow anyone working for me to mix with the passengers." Blackton turned away. Steve turned to watch him go. Had Blackton seen the look Steve wore, his untroubled air would have changed to vigilant watchfulness.

"Sooner or later, there's bound to be fireworks here," was Steve's comment to himself.

With the exception of two lascar hands whom he had called to shorten sail, Steve had the deck to himself for the next two hours. The captain, whose next watch it was, was snoring in his cabin unmindful of the fallen glass. A long wall of

darkest gray crept slowly down the port quarter, while the wind now whistling through the rigging, heeled the *Sayonara* at an uncomfortable angle.

Steve, however, braced himself and after a critical glance aloft, decided that she could carry the spread of sail that he had left her and fell to wondering what strange errand he was on. "She asked me if I had a sister, I wonder if—." These transient thoughts of Lois were driven from him by the exigencies of his duty which were becoming more engrossing as the moments sped.

The angry crests and curling billows that slid hissing at the forefoot of the schooner lost their violence. The wind now came in a steady blast, beating flat the surface of the water. Blackton came on deck twenty minutes late, to take the wheel. He glanced aloft and noted the trim of the rigging.

"Good work, Steve. You're a 'puka' sailor."

Steve smiled a knowing smile and after re-

peating the course walked away. As he entered the cabin Hell broke loose. .

Though ready for the blow, the *Sayonara* staggered like a stricken bird, then, with the pride of a hundred just such battles behind her, lifted her foot and crushed a mighty swell beneath it. From the galley came the crash of falling tinware and invective of Ah Wing.

Came the rain, not the pattering of the temperate zones, but the torrential cloudburst of the tropics, filling the scuppers on the instant. Had the skipper time to leave the wheel, and look down the waist transom, he might have seen in whispered conversation over the little saloon table, a couple talking earnestly.

As he put his weight to the wheel that struggled against him, his mind visualized the contents of the box and into the picture crept thoughts of Lois, who until attained, would be lovely beyond words. His active mind became busy in planning that attainment.

Steve had just entered the saloon. She had

been awaiting him. Raising a cautioning finger, and indicating the door of her father's cabin, she warned him to talk low. When he was seated opposite her, she said, "Steve, I have much to tell you. More depends upon you than you know. I know because I feel it. Something tells me that you will be able to see us through it. You told me that you do not know what island we are bound for. I can tell you that, though Captain Blackton does not know. I shall, also, tell you what we are going there for." Lois paused.

"The wreck and total loss of the ship Bentnida is the cause of the whole thing, possibly you remember hearing of it years ago. I don't, for it was when I was a baby almost in arms. Father was the captain of the Bentnida. Some very, very valuable papers or something, I don't really know the exact nature of the thing, were intrusted to father's care. He was to bring them to America. There was a terrible storm, and the vessel struck a reef, for they were blown far out

of their course. Father was the only one saved. He was thrown ashore on an island. On the island there lived a tribe of people that, though savages, cared for father and tried to nurse him back to health.

After several months with these people, whom father describes as the most stalwart and just natives he had ever seen, he regained enough strength to build himself a hut apart from the native village, which was very dirty and into this he moved all the things that had floated ashore, and been taken care of for him by the natives. It seemed that years before some missionary had befriended the tribe during a scourge of sickness and they in turn befriended the white men in trouble.

One of the things that had floated ashore was father's sea chest, in which he had placed the little black box containing the things intrusted to him. Whether it was money, bonds, or what, he has never told me, but it was a great joy to him when he found the box still intact.

Things went on uneventfully for some time, when a pearling lugger put ashore for water and departed again without father seeing it. When the natives told father of it, he had been on the other side of the island at the time it was there, he began to worry and brood over not having seen it, for he could have gone back to civilization on it. From the disconnected things he has told me of what followed, he must have lost his mind, for shortly afterward another pearling vessel stopped and they found father. He only dimly remembers rushing out into the surf in his eagerness to get on board. They took him to Thursday Island where, after a time in the hospital, he was sent back to America.

He arrived at San Francisco, where an inquiry was started and father was exonerated for losing the ship, but some sharp tongued people, those who had been waiting for whatever it was that father had been intrusted with, started whispering and soon father heard little things dropped that hurt him.

The little that he had saved before the wreck was enough to keep us. Mother had died while he was on the island, and I was left with an Aunt in Oakland. He continually worried about not being able to repay the people for their loss, and when Uncle Ned died and left his insurance to me, father grew more morose than ever. He felt that the people thought that he had stolen their inheritance, and was living on it.

Then one time I overheard a conversation in which I was described as the daughter of that 'old crook,' and I determined to change things. I went home and asked father all about it, and he told all. I told him he must go back to the island and recover the treasure. He refused at first, because he did not want to touch my money, but I showed him where my happiness depended upon it, and he finally agreed. The expenses of the trip would take nearly half of the money left me. Then there followed several months of search in all the out of the way corners of the pearling waters for someone that remembered

father's arrival on Thursday Island, and the boat that brought him there.

It was when we had nearly given up hope of ever finding where the island was, that word came from the old diver in charge of the lugger that had rescued father. He sent some charts and father and I sailed for Singapore.

That is all there is to that part of it, Steve. That much of it don't worry me. What does worry me is Captain Blackton."

"Captain Blackton!" echoed Steve. "Why Captain Blackton? Has he been bothering you?"

"No, Steve. It is not for myself that I am worried but for father. I hated the Captain from the minute I first saw him, and he follows me everywhere with his eyes, but I am not afraid of that. This afternoon I saw him coming out of father's cabin. I was on deck at the time, and was looking down this transom." Lois looked up at the transom above her head as she said this. "I thought nothing of it at the time,

but later I remembered that father had been sitting on the back end of the boat all afternoon, in fact ever since tiffin. In order to be sure about it, I asked father if he had been in his cabin since tiffin, and he said that he had not, so I told him what I had seen."

"What did he say?" whispered Steve.

"He seemed startled at first, but after thinking it over for a moment, he put his arms around me and said that I was all fussed up, and that the Captain was probably looking for him, and then finding him out had closed the door of the cabin, and left the saloon. But Steve,—the Captain came right on deck and didn't look for father at all. I just know that he is up to something."

Steve leaned back lost in thought. "Well, Miss Markham, I don't know what is in the wind, but I do think that the Captain will bear watching. You needn't fear anything serious happening. I'll be on the lookout for any funny business, and I'll be handy if you need me."

"Thank you, Steve, I will count on you."

There was a new note in her voice. Steve looked full into her eyes. There was a quality there that awakened something that he had thought dead within him. He paused, groping for words with which to express what was in his heart.

“Miss Markham, this afternoon you asked me if I had a sister. I said ‘Yes,’ that I had had one once. I want to tell you of her.” He pronounced the word “her” so softly that it became reverent.

“She was the dearest girl in all the world and after mother’s death she and I became inseparable. I left the sea when mother died, intending to settle down ashore and look after Sis, and then some old friends of the family got me into the wholesale rubber business. The firm I was with sent me on a trip to the Federated Malay States to look after some of their interests. I went and stayed upon their request to straighten out a tangle that a former manager had left. I saw that I would be there for some time, so I cabled Sis to come and spend the year out with

me. I thought it would be a nice chance for Sis to see the world. She cabled me of leaving Frisco, and also of her arrival at Singapore. The boats were pretty well filled up with war business, and her wire from Singapore said that she had engaged passage upon a coasting schooner for Penang, where I was to meet her. That schooner never reached Penang. I was terribly worried when it didn't show up. I made allowance for rough weather and waited two weeks. In those two weeks I nearly went insane. Then I went to Singapore. I haunted the water front making inquiries, but could find no trace of her. One day while sitting in the Raffles lobby, a boy brought in the paper and I read this," fumbling in an inner pocket he brought out a small bill fold, from this he took a short newspaper clipping, which he handed to Lois. Taking it from his trembling hand, she read:

Batavia Spl.

SUICIDE IN BATAVIA HOTEL

Miss Gloria Maitland found dead by

self inflicted gunshot. Police investigating mysterious aspects of case. Deceased left unaddressed letter to brother. Holding body for identification. Straits papers please copy.

Gloria Maitland! Lois let fall the slip of paper. Steve's hand closed over it. Before her startled mind there flashed the vision of the fly-leaf of the book she had read. The book which at that very moment was lying upon her trunk in her cabin. The truth engulfed her leaving her for the moment speechless in a chaos of emotions. Blackton was the man. It was he whom Steve wanted to meet of all men. Through her mind there raced with lightning speed the consequences should she tell him what she knew. Her judgment told her that here, Blackton was the master. It told her that her father's mission was to be considered and there came fear with the thought that Steve might be injured in a fight with Blackton and the thought was strangely disquieting. She clasped her hands,

arms resting upon the table and closed her eyes in an agony of indecision. Came the picture of what must have happened right on this very boat, the picture of Steve, bareheaded beside the open grave in Batavia, and the memory of the Rosary played with unearthly sweetness that first night of the voyage.

Rising, her eyes filling, she slowly walked around the table to his side, laying her hand upon his shoulder. A long moment passed in silence save for the drumming of the rain on the deck above.

“That afternoon I caught a steamer for Java,” continued Steve, “and reported to the police immediately on landing at Batavia. They took me in the office and handed me the letter. The moment I unfolded it, I knew it was no mistake, for it was in her handwriting. They kept the note, but it told me what had made her do it. The ——— skipper of that boat had ruined her. She fought him like a fury, but what chance had she, a girl?”

Lois passed the oath unnoticed. It was a plain statement of fact and so was not profane. With tears falling, her hand stole up and rested on Steve's hair above his ear. "Steve—Steve" was all that she said.

"I went back to Singapore," continued Steve, "to keep my promise that I made her when the clods fell on her coffin— Miss Markham, I'm looking for that man, and when I find him—." The brown hands slowly closed.

"Some day you will kill him" whispered Lois.

* * * * *

"Dilapan poloh," the singsong call of the man at the lead, broke the silence with the welcome news that there were twenty-eight fathoms of water beneath the keel of the Sayonara. His sinuous arms swung the twenty-five pound lead for another sounding. A mile ahead was the island. Between the Sayonara and its shores, there was a long line of breaking water. This was the reef. Within it lay a quiet lagoon of crystal sapphire.

Slowly working the schooner toward it, chary of hidden sharptoothed reefs, the skipper stood glass in hand, while Steve was forward with the anchor gear.

Markham, with Lois close beside him, leaned upon the rail, tortured with impatience. The air was potent with suppressed feeling, the silence broken only by the monotonous chant of the leadsman. Thus the next half hour passed until, when near the narrow entrance, the lascars dropped the dinghy and towed her through the opening in the reef. Steve dropped the anchor in the middle of the lagoon. He watched it till it struck the snow white bottom. Circling round the chain there passed a shadow.

Fringing the dazzling beach, the silent coconuts nodded their heads in somnolent apathy. Beneath them, hidden in the deep shade of the ferns were two peering eyes. The hoarse rumble of the anchor chains shattering the tranquil stillness wakened into life the dozing denizens of the jungle. Far back from the edge of the

simmering beach, beat the tom toms of the island people. It was the time of the yearly offering, the nuptial ceremony of Hui, the spirit father of the people.

Kalom parted the giant fern fronds the better to see the Sayonara as she gently swung to the lowering breeze that made her tug gently at her anchor. This was a different ship than the ones that customarily touched for water. The boats he knew were pearling luggers, and the men on them he had found by sad experience were best let alone.

Kalom, before being startled by the rasping of the chain, had been brooding. Atel, the flower of the tribe, chosen by acclaim, was dressed in nuptial garlands. She was to become the bride of Hui, the spirit God of the island people. For a year was she to remain apart, unseen by mankind, in the deep recesses of the labyrinth of the Dead. They had parted the night before, and Kalom with sorrowing heart, had spent the night alone in miserable foreboding. Seldom did the

wives of Hui return to the kampong with the bloom of their youthful beauty. The sweltering air of the abode of Hui made them old before their time. Now the tom toms were beating in the council clearing before the cavern entrance, where the rumble of Hui's impatience made the people tremble lest he be displeased.

In the center of the hollow mountain where the rose colored fires were tossing in their annual turbulence, stood the carven image of the God. Atel, his golden skinned Atel, whose cheeks glowed with the warmth of the crimson hibiscus, was soon to pass from his hungry arms to live amid the fires. The thought sickened him. Then had come the schooner. It was a further darkening of his sky. Had not the last white man who had come brought sickness upon them. His people must be warned. He must fly to them and warn them of the coming.

He gazed with narrowed lids across the sweltering beach where the heat devils danced madly up and down. The white men on the schooner

were getting into a small boat. They were coming ashore. With the silent stealth of the jungle born, Kalom gently let the ferns swing back to their places and noiselessly threaded his way to the thickets. When in their friendly cover he ran to the council clearing. The ceremony was just beginning and the chant of the sacred offering, swelling in melancholy cadence, died in softening diminuendo as he burst from the green wall of the undergrowth. Maktil, the venerable servant of Hui, turned from his place before the cavern entrance and with lowered arms, demanded to know the reason of the sacrilegious interruption. He noted it was Kalom who had burst upon them. Kalom the lover of Atel! Kalom opened his lips to speak, but Maktil, his face terrible with wrath, bade him be silent. This was no time for earthly love to claim its own. It was the hour of the offering.

From the dark recesses of the vaulted chambers of the cavern came a grumbling roar. Hui ever thus, voiced his displeasure for he was the

God of the Fires. The people threw themselves in prostrate trembling upon their faces. It was Maktil, who saved them from the wrath of Hui. Turning to the now smoking opening, he threw his hands aloft and in wild vehemence, plead that Hui forgive the sin of Kalom. The roar slowly subsided, and the people breathed again. Petrified with fear, Kalom kept his eyes upon Maktil, never daring to look at Atel, who stood within the high arched entrance, radiant with the full bloom of her voluptuous beauty. In her hair glowed the red hibiscus, vieing with her cheeks to rival the glow of her golden body. From her shoulder tentatively hiding the full breast, drooped a single garland of the mauve moonflower. A golden Venus that stood motionless before the rose reflection of the eternal fires that burned at the carven feet of the idol in the inner cavern.

When the dinghy had drawn alongside, Lois went below for her sun hat. Markham was already overside, when she returned on deck.

Turning to talk to Blackton, who stood at the rail, he said, "I think I can go directly to the place, Captain. If so, I will return immediately, and we can get away with the next tide."

To Lois he said "Hurry, child, can't you see that I am waiting?" Lois smiled at his impatience.

"I brought some water, Daddy," this, as she swung the nickeled bottle to him to catch. Lois was always practical and Markham smiled in turn.

"Send the boat back to the ship" said Blackton as the lascars pulled away. I'll send the boys ashore for fresh water for the schooner."

"All right," answered Markham.

Blackton watched them land and disappear in the green shadows of the jungle. His eyes wandered to the cliffs that overhung the sea further down the beach. Over these there wheeled in planing flight, the giant fish-hawk of the island dotted seas. As Blackton watched, the hawk poised momentarily, then, dropping like a

plummet, disappeared in an eruption of glistening spray only to rise a moment later, a gleaming silver something in his talons.

“That’s the way to do it,” murmured Blackton, “Grab, when they’re not expecting it. I’ll let him find the box, and then—well, thank you ‘Burong ikan’ (fish bird) for the tip, I’ll play it, and right soon too, if the old man finds the treasure.”

The return of the dinghy interrupted further cogitation, and Blackton swung down into it, telling the boys to hasten to the shore. Steve watched him go over a thoughtful pipe.

Telling the lascars to remain at the waterline, with the dinghy, Blackton strode into the tall tapa grass that grew along shore, his thoughts busy with Markham’s evident desire to keep the nature of the contents of the black box from him. He was following the broad trail of trampled grass where Markham and Lois had passed, when he heard, bourne to him down the breeze, the beat of the tom toms. He stopped. The

sound came from the jungle ahead, but a little to his right. Markham and Lois had turned to the left at a point a little farther on. He could hear the chant of the people rising now to wailing crescendo, then fading away to a soft murmur, as Maktil went on with his prayer to Hui. Blackton was filled with curiosity. Familiar as he was with the natives of the Indies, he had never heard the same melancholy chant before. Making his way with the stealth of a fox, he hastened toward the sounds.

He soon came to the edge of the jungle clearing. Atel stood in the mouth of the cavern, a golden Venus. On the ground about the opening were the people of Hui, their bodies swaying slowly to the rhythm of the chant. His jaw dropped in wonder. Never had he seen so beautiful a woman. His quick eye surveyed her—her great mass of jet hair, the crimson cheeks, the full red lips that were tremulous with excitement, the full rounded bosoms that melted into the tapering waist, the curve of the hips, the

molding of the limbs, the voluptuous appeal of her enthralled him. She was a living statue, still, gorgeous, glowing warm.

Blackton forgot Markham and the black box.

As he gazed, Maktil bade the drummers beat to quickened time, the nose flutes with soft melody took up the tune. It was the sensuous betrothal dance. Slowly, with sinuous undulations of the hips and body, Atel began to dance. Her graceful arms embraced the fancied form of her spirit lover, her eyes lighted with the ecstasy of her passionate exhalation. As the drums beat faster, Atel, with quickening steps danced with wild abandon, and the tameless longing she expressed——.”

“God, what a woman!” Blackton’s groping hand tore at the neckband of his shirt. He took a step forward, then remembering the natives, he watched the ending of the dance. Exhausted with frenzied effort, Atel sank to the ground, a thing of palpitating allurements. Two old women rose from the shadows of the cavern and went to

her. Assisting her to her feet, they slowly led her inward. As the trio passed from their sight, the people knelt, their foreheads to the ground. From within came the voice of Hui. It was a low melodious rumble of welcome, welcome to the bride.

When Atel was lost in the rose murk of the cavern, Blackton straightened up. He realized that he must not be seen. He had noted that Maktil in queer Malay had consecrated Atel the virgin, to the arms of Hui. He had understood enough of the bizarre ceremony to know that Atel was to be left alone within the hollow mountain. He knew that the men of the tribe would never violate the sacred precincts of the abode of Hui. This thought gave him comfort. Atel would receive her lord. He would be the husband of the Flower of the tribe. He would wait until the people left the place, wait until the women left her. Then with the coming of the night, he would visit the sacred chamber. With the silent stealth of a tiger, he shrank into the olive silence

of the jungle. He regained the beach unseen.

Lois sat upon a fallen trunk. Her father paced a tiny clear space in the thicket beside the fallen tapang tree. Dimly, like an apparition, seen and gone, this spot came to him as the site of the little shack he had lived in while he had lived upon the island. The thick growing verdure had clothed what had once been his clearing with so thick a mantle that no vestige of the old shack was left. The sun was nearing its way to the western horizon, when Markham gave up his search for the cabin in which he had left his sea chest. It was in this chest that he had left the black box which he had come to find. Lois comforted him with assurances that it would be only a day or two until his memory would return. To this, he only shook his head, and gravely pointed at the sky in the northeast. In that quarter it was a dull slate color, and the sea was ominously calm.

“This is just the time of the year that I lost my ship,” he said, “The typhoons sweep down

here from the north and wreck everything in their paths."

"Is that a typhoon, Daddy," asked Lois, pointing to the blue gray sky in the northeast.

"It looks like wind to me," he answered. "Come, child, we must return to the schooner before we get wet. There's bound to be rain with it or close behind."

They walked at quickened pace toward the beach. They had nearly cleared the last thicket that screened the *Sayonara* from them, when Markham sprang from Lois' side, and with a scream of exultation, leaped into a mass of tangled creepers that overgrew a small mound of something. As he pulled away the vines, the thing came into Lois' view. It was the shack her father sought.

The walls were lying piled upon the roof, which lay flat upon the ground, and piled upon the whole were great boulders. These Markham shook his head over. It was as if someone had placed them there to protect and prevent removal

of what lay beneath them. Then he remembered having seen the natives pile stones upon the dismantled homes of those who had died or gone in voluntary sacrifice to the Cave of the Flames.

Markham tried to remove the smaller of these, but was not equal to the task. Lois watched him for a moment and said, "You will only tire yourself out, Daddy, let me go to the schooner and get help."

Markham frowned at this, but Lois had her way. Her father set about pulling away the remaining growth while she hastened to the schooner. The dinghy was just returning to the beach, for Blackton had just gone aboard. As it's blunt nose bit into the soft coral sand, Lois jumped in and telling the lascars to hurry to the schooner, she settled herself on the narrow plank that served for both a brace and a seat in it's bow.

Steve assisted her aboard, asking at the same time of her father.

"He has found the shack," she told him, "and

I must get help for him. There are great rocks piled all over it. The walls were made of bamboo lattice, and father cannot pull them out of the way to get at his sea chest, which was buried underneath the corner where he slept. He wants enough men to clear away the shack before the rain comes."

Steve nodded. "I must ask the Captain, Miss Lois, for with that wind in the northeast, I don't dare to leave the schooner shorthanded without permission."

"Blackton caught the last words Steve uttered as he rounded the corner of the deckhouse. "No, Cupid, I wouldn't either, if I were you. You'd better get everything made fast right now if you value your ticket. Get a move on you! Give her fifty fathoms of chain so that the hook don't drag, and square off the yards on the fo'mast."

As Steve turned to carry out the orders, Blackton turned to Lois, "What was it, Lois?" he asked.

Lois looked up in stunned surprise. Blackton

smiled indulgently. What Lois read in those smiling eyes made her sick with fear. Blackton grasped what was in her mind, and changed his tactics. "Take it slow with this one," he warned himself mentally, and, with studied politeness said, "I'm sorry I said that, Miss Markham, I was just trying to be funny. Now what were you telling Steve just now?"

Lois hesitated a moment, then recovering her poise told him of the finding of the ruined shack and of her father's need of help. Blackton, with well simulated indifference told her that he would send help immediately and that, as it would rain shortly, she had better go below and get her oiled silk coat, though he advised her against returning to her father.

Lois thought a moment, then said, "I'll return immediately with my coat, Captain Blackton, I must be with father when he finds the box."

She turned from him and hastened below. As she disappeared through the doorway, Blackton blew his whistle, and three of the lascars came

to him running. "Get a pick and shovel," he ordered one of them. The others he ordered into the dinghy to man the oars, and followed them over the rail. The lascar sent after the tools had just returned and was placing them in the small boat when Lois came on deck. Blackton answered her look of inquiry, as to where she would sit with "I'll send the dinghy back for you Miss Markham. There will not be room in her for you this trip." With this Blackton nodded to the boys and they pulled away shoreward. Lois stamped her foot petulantly.

"Send them back immediately, Captain Blackton, I do not wish to wait!" she called.

"You'll wait till I get good and ready, Lois," murmured Blackton smilingly, but Lois only saw the nodded "Yes."

She watched the dinghy wallow through the easy surf, and also watched with rising anger the men pull the boat upon the dry sand, away from the water's edge. Then they shouldered the tools and strode after Blackton along the

broad trail that Lois and her father had made. As they melted into the gloom of the darkening jungle, she sat down in a deck chair, consumed with anger.

Twenty minutes passed in silence. Steve was busy with the anchor gear in the bow. Faintly bourne to the schooner from the distant native kampong came the low murmur of the council drum, sonorous, sustained, measured.

Blackton walked far enough into the screen of palms to be hidden from view of those on the schooner, before he paused in his walk to where Markham was impatiently awaiting the arrival of help. There were three of the lascars with him. Two of these he sent ahead, telling the one who carried the tools to wait a moment. When the others had passed beyond hearing he turned again to the third saying, "Ali, I want the box the old man is digging for. The old man is better off dead. You savvy? When I shake my head, you fix him quick, one time job, savvy?" Then lapsing into Malay "Sudah mati lekas,

sahya boleh kasi ampat poloh ringgit.” (If you kill quickly I will give you forty dollars).

Ali was distinctly ready to make forty dollars, but his crafty soul told him that the job was worth more. He hesitated just the proper interval to make Blackton raise the offer. Blackton scowled darkly, mentally planning that the money should never be paid, and raised the offer by ten dollars.

“Sudah” (it is well) was Ali’s comment. He would do Blackton’s bidding.

Together they resumed the walk to find upon arrival at the ruined shack, the two lascars busily engaged in clearing away the twisted framework.

In his eagerness to get at the chest, Markham forgot his former reticence, and enthusiastically described how he had left it buried. He told Blackton how the natives had cared for him, and that they never harmed a stranger, for their code was one of strict justice to all, although when wronged they exacted an eye for an eye. It was

the old Mosaic law handed down from some early Malay trader who had visited the place a century before. Blackton listened, but his thoughts were on something else. He could hear the tom toms beating in the distance. The sound reminded him of the golden vision he had seen a few hours before. The work in hand must be finished quickly, he told himself, he must pay Atel his respects that very evening.

The remnants of the shack were cleared easily after the boulders had been rolled away, and Markham pointed out the spot where the chest was buried to one of the lascars, telling him to take the shovel and dig it out.

After a questioning look at Blackton, who nodded his assent, the lascar fell to digging, soon uncovering the chest. When it was clear of the clinging mold that enveloped it, Markham could restrain himself no longer. He brushed the man aside and knelt beside the shallow hole, grasping the chest to lift it out. It was as Blackton had planned. With a nod to Ali which was unseen

by the others, he ordered Markham's death, drawing his pistol as Ali leaped toward Markham with the pick up-raised. There was a tearing crunch as the sharp point cleaved the skull. With Ali's act, Blackton sprung into action. He raised the pistol, and as Ali turned to him smiling, he leveled it without haste, and shot him through the heart.

Ali died gurgling the curse of "Bukan" upon Blackton. The two lascars turned in fright, and running as though a thousand devils chased them, made for the shore and the waiting dinghy.

At the shot, which echoed sharply in the tranquil air, Lois leaped to her feet. The figures of the lascars running burst upon her startled gaze. Then, after what seemed hours to Lois, frozen with fear at the rail, there stepped from the screening jungle a figure with a black box under its arm. In the deepening dusk, she had some difficulty in discerning who it was. Reaching for her glasses, which dangled by their straps from a thole pin by the stays, she leveled them to

look. After some little difficulty in adjusting them, she gave one searching glance and with a little moan like a spent deer, sank to the deck in a heap. The figure she saw was Blackton, and his possession of the box told her the story.

Steve raised Lois tenderly, and laid her on the deck chair, while he went for water. The lascars had reached the boat and were on their way to the ship. Blackton blew his whistle, and they, after a frightened glance at him, then to the schooner, hove to, and awaited his coming. Steve had just brought Lois to her senses when he clambered overside. He walked up to the chair she lay in. Raising instantly upon seeing him, she said, "Where is father?"

"Miss Markham," he answered, "I'm sorry, I have terrible news for you. One of the lascars attacked your father, and tried to steal the box. I arrived just in time to see your father fall for I had gone a slight distance away to watch some natives. I arrived too late to save him. I shot the lascar and will take the rest in hand to see

just how far this plot ran. Here is the box, Miss Markham, it is your property now."

Lois did not hear the last he said for she had fainted. Steve's face augured ill for someone. The lascars made the dinghy fast alongside and sulked aft.

"We'll get out of here tomorrow with the late tide Steve, so get a move on you, round up those d—— skunks and see that the old man is buried."

"Hadn't we better have a proper burial for Mr. Markham, sir," said Steve, "Miss Markham would feel much better for it."

"No, she wouldn't, his head isn't pretty to look at after the way Ali used that pick. Off with you now before she comes to, or we'll have a scene."

"Shall I carry her below then?"

"No, I'll take care of her, you get along."

Loathe to go, but anxious to learn more of the meaning of the tragedy before committing himself to any rash action, Steve summoned the las-

cars and after receiving instructions from Blackton to send the dinghy back for him, was pulled ashore.

When he was safely gone, Blackton turned to Lois, commenting to himself as he did so. "Now, my little lady, we'll put you where you can have your little cry without disturbing anybody." Picking her up, he carried her to her cabin, and laid her in the berth. After a moment's appraisal of her condition he shut the door, and went on deck. Going instantly to the black box, he picked it up.

After examining the brass lock that held it closed, he carried it to her cabin. Listening for a moment outside the door, and hearing no sound within, he entered. Lois was sitting bolt upright, staring with unseeing eyes into a great blackness. It was the blackness of soulsearing despair. Tears would not come to her relief. Her eyes just burned and ached and great dry sobs came when she tried to articulate the word "Father."

He placed the box upon the floor beside the bunk looking at her spell bound. Here was a kind of grief entirely new to him. When he heard the great sob wrung from the heart of the tortured girl, he turned and ran to the deck. Black as his conscience was, he could not stand the sight. For the first time in his life, Blackton felt the sting of remorse. It came to him, not as a definite, fully developed tangible sensation, but rather as an indefinable uneasiness that disquieted him.

Before his mind's eye there passed a fleeting vision of those whom he had wronged in the past and the line was long. In it were the shadowy figures of men that had died. Each of these seemed to point to him and say:

“The cup is very full, brimming full, Blackton. Soon it will hold no more.” Last in the line was the phantom of Markham. When Blackton saw it, the wraith of the father of the broken girl in the cabin below, he cringed and his fear of the dead men grew within him, never

to be eradicated. From that moment, death became a horror which was to haunt him every waking hour, and to torture him in sleep.

As the phantom line moved on into the empty shadows of his mind, he remembered Atel, and the Place of Flame. Lust succeeded fear, and cursing himself for a soft fool, he strode to the rail and dropped into the waiting dinghy. Rapidly he was rowed to the sloping shore, where the restless waves seemed to whisper a litany to the dead. Through the fast gathering darkness of the brooding night came a muffled voice. Steve was standing beside a low mound of time worn coral rocks. He was talking to his Maker and her's.

* * * * *

The rose fires illumined the cavern with warm softness, peopling the shadows of the recesses with fantastic shapes. Atel lay upon a pallet before the image of the God, whose face in the fitful glow contorted with the chimera of a thousand fancies. Far down below at the foot of the

mountain, sitting upon a rugged shelf beside a fissure that opened into the cavernous grottos, sat Kalom, playing with sweet insistence the "masi," the love song of the people, on the nose flute.

Atel lay in waiting. Hui would come to her. The great snow white spirit that protected her people would come at the midnight hour, and she would mate with the God. Maktil had prepared her. It was to be a mating of the soul, and she thrilled with the fervor of her fanatic exaltation. Down the labyrinthine corridors of the place came the sound of Blackton's coming. Atel rose to her feet in listening reverence. As the white form of Blackton emerged from the dimness of the corridor, she prostrated herself to him. To her it was the coming of Hui. As he neared her she rose again and the rose flames in mellow efflorescence lighted her rounded figure with an irridescent sheen of lustrous splendor.

Blackton stopped to appraise her. He noted

the fire of the religious fervor that lighted the depths of her liquid eyes. He noted the tumult of her breast, and the quiver of excitement that gripped her. He misread the intensity of her emotion for that of the intoxication of passion. In purblind brutality he seized her, overcome by the rose-tinted witchery reflected from her irresistible form. She shrank to him, and he pressed the full lips in a lingering kiss of turpid desire.

The rose tints faded to a low mauve as the voice of Hui rose in wrath at the desecration of his bride, but Blackton neither saw nor heard. Oblivious to the premonitory warning, Blackton pursued his unholy conquest. To Atel, in her unhesitating faith, he was the God.

Before Steve had returned to the Sayonara, Blackton had entered the place of the Flames. It was in melancholy silence that he climbed over the rail and slumped back into the deck chair that had been Lois'. She heard him cross the



"To Atel he was the God"

deck above her head. Soon she came to him, her face drawn with suffering.

“Steve,” she said, “take me to father.” Steve involuntarily looked at the dark line of palms that hid the rocky mound. Then he glanced at the encircling horizon. It was a black wall that hid the stars. The air was restless, coming and going in fitful gusts. In answer to Lois’ request he said, “There is a heavy storm brewing, Miss Lois. The glass has been acting queerly all day. It would be better to remain on the schooner tonight. I really expect heavy weather.”

“Steve, take me to father,” was her only answer.

He looked gravely at the coming blackness and raised his whistle to his lips. The shrill blast brought the lascars running, and his terse orders sent them making all fast upon the Sayonara that all be snug when the wind should hit them.

He watched them in their work until all was ready for the blow and then gently assisted Lois

overside. Anxious to escape a wetting, the crew bent to the oars, but the squall was coming with express train speed. The visible half of the horizon was velvet black, and stray wisps of cloud, like heralds of misfortune flew in scudding drift across the rising moon.

As they landed, the first gust of the storm was upon them and bourne down upon wind was the hissing roar of the rain upon the water. Lois paid not the slightest attention to externals but with Steve beside her for guidance went directly to the grave. Steve had moved Markham's body from the scene of the tragedy to an open spot upon the shore. As they neared the mound Steve dropped slightly behind and turned away. Lois stood at it's foot for a moment, then sank to her knees with a moan. "Daddy," was all Steve heard,—then the storm was upon them. Like a rending, tearing fiend, the squall broke with the roar of a might cataract, but Lois did not hear or feel it. Steve turned to look at the schooner, but it was blotted from sight by a wall of rain

that obscured even the dinghy lying on the beach.

Instead of abating in fury, the wind increased in violence and Steve went to Lois and spoke to her gently. She did not hear him, and he laid his hand softly on her shoulder.

“Miss Lois, let me take you back to the schooner. The storm is getting worse, and soon the lagoon inside the reef will be too rough for the dinghy.”

Lois turned a haggard face to his. Her eyes burned, red-rimmed and dry, from a countenance, the pallor of which startled Steve. Tears would not come to her relief. Nature was weeping for her. The coolness of those tears was grateful to her though she did not sense it. Her voice, broken and dry as her eyes, was scarcely audible above the roar of the storm.

“I shall spend this night with Daddy.”

Steve could not find it in his heart to say more. He turned and walked away to a boulder near the place and sat down to keep her vigil with her.

The wind was fast becoming a hurricane and

he was worried for the safety of the schooner. The lagoon was now an angry white capped stretch of water that would swamp the dinghy in an instant. Steve looked across the narrow band of sand that held back the tremendous rollers that boomed and crashed, shaking with their impact the coral strand on which they stood. The rain ceased as suddenly as it came, but the wind rose momentarily until its shrieking howl obliterated all other sound. The roar of the surf was lost in one great avalanche of soul-killing deafening noise that was stupefying to Steve.

For the moment he was lost in its fury, then he thought of Lois and ran to her. She was still kneeling, but her head was supported by the rough coral rocks of the mound.

Fighting his way, bracing himself against the wind driven spray that caught and tore at him at every step, each drop carrying with it sand from the beach that cut his face like hot needles, he forced his way toward her. He knelt beside her to raise her head upon his arm. Merciful

unconsciousness had come to her. Rising to his feet, he blew his whistle, but as he blew it, he realized it's futility to cope with that storm. In that hurricane, the lascars would never hear him.

Fifty feet on one side of him a white wall rose from the sea and swept far into the fringe of palms. Behind them not more than a few yards, was a low gully that paralleled the sea. This was full of water from the wash of the waves over the low places on the shore. The sand on which they stood was the top of the old coral reef that in centuries before had encircled the island.

Now to the left and right the sea was breaching the beach, and he knew himself to be hemmed in by the roaring water. If the sea rose further everything upon the narrow band on which they were, would be swept in one seething churning mass into the twisted jungle far back of them. He looked about in terrified indecision. With a wind that he could scarcely breast alone, the problem of carrying Lois to a place of safety

appalled him. A second wall, towering high above the ferns rose, crossing near to them, missing the place on which they stood by a scant five yards. Steve leaped into action.

He gathered Lois in his arms and turned to carry her to a massive trunk that was standing on the highest point of the beach, just behind them. A second later another wall smashed and Steve heard above the roar of the hurricane the rending and snapping of the palms that had withstood the two previous onslaughts.

The massive trunks, dinghy, lascars, everything in the path of that irresistible, insane fury of water were swept like thistle down into the thrashing, killing, crushing maelstrom of falling trees to the jungle. The strength of a mad fear came to Steve and, without sensing the tearing blast that whipped the stout fabric of Lois' skirt, he flung himself toward the trunk of the palm with the fury of desperation. Lois lay like a dead thing in his arms.

Twice before reaching the palm, he was

stopped by the hurricane which held him motionless against its breast. Leaning forward at an impossible angle, he drove himself slowly forward, and with a last despairing effort, reached the trunk. He got behind it, and with Lois between him and the rough surface, clung to it for support.

The breaching seas were coming nearer now. One giant wave wetted him to the knees with its wash.

The trunk inclined slightly from the sea for the "trades" generally came from that direction, and Steve started to climb. Forcing Lois higher up and over his shoulder, he climbed, the trunk between his knees and by slow lifting of his arms, raised his double burden upward. The side wash grappled at his feet, and he was forced to stop and hold on, but he won his way slowly upward by inches until he cleared the curling water.

As he climbed, the trunk became thinner and he was able to clasp his limbs about it. He loos-

ened his belt, and passing it around the trunk, endeavored to get it around Lois. The belt was too short and he crushed her to the stem of the palm in vain attempt to make it reach. Lois regained her senses with the pain of that pressure. Fright came upon her and she struggled, but Steve reassured her. Soon she was able to help him with the belt and worked it around her waist. With this accomplished she relieved Steve of some of her weight.

The trunk was vibrating now like a reed. It did not sway, but stood braced by it's sloping angle to the storm. They were drenched with the wind driven spray that came on and on in solid sheets. Their's was the only palm left standing in the murk.

The beach on either side was now a white smother that had swept away the sand down to the rock beneath. The little raise their palm was on, was sheltered by an upjutting of the coral that in the angry swirl of the waters was

strengthened by the sand that settled in the eddy at it's foot.

The trunk was cracking and groaning, and Steve gave up hope. The resistance it offered to the wind with their weight added, was proving too much for it, and with each shock that shook the coral to it's base, he felt that it would go. There was only one thing to be done and Steve drew his heavy claspknife from his pocket, opening it with his teeth. Reaching as far as he could above Lois' head, he struck again and again at the friendly trunk, each time biting out with the keen edge of the knife, a little chip. The trunk was standing at the extreme limit of it's endurance to begin with, and when the knife severed the fibres on it's windward surface, it snapped short off a foot above their heads. The portion that towered fifty feet above them swung down and sailed horizontally like a great battering ram, into the twisted chaos of the leveled jungle.

Steve got his forearm over the splintered end

and rested his aching limbs. The stump stood like a rock now, without quivering and Steve breathed a prayer of thanksgiving. Lois sagged in the loop of the belt for her strength was gone, and Steve, after resting his cramped thighs, lifted her higher and hooked the belt over the edge of the splintered end of the stump. After what seemed hours, exhaustion complete and stupefying came to Lois and she slept with Steve changing arms now and then as the pain of the pressure of his arm on the sharp splinters became unendurable.

In the kampong of the people there was ruin. Although in the shelter of the encircling jungle the hurricane had found it. Not a house was left standing and the people had taken refuge in one of the outer openings of the caverns of the hollow mountain. Deep within the bowels of the mountain was the abode of Hui where Blackton, unconscious of the storm that raged without, was utterly detached, holding in wanton arms the enthralling Atel.

As the hours passed, the torture of the splinters on Steve's arms was more than he could stand, but he clung on in agony of fear that should he be swept away, Lois would be lost.

The storm like a lion cheated of it's prey, still roared about them but only a thin sheet of the wash of the breaching seas now slid around the base of the stump. It was into a scant two inches of this slow moving water that Steve dropped from his hold eight feet above, when the pain overcame him.

He struck on his feet and his knees giving way beneath him, rolled on his side and lay there in the lee of the projecting rim of the coral. The sun was clear of the horizon when he awakened. Lois hung with her face pressed against the stump for the belt had worked up beneath her shoulders.

Only racing billows now pounded the clean white sand on the beach below. High upon the beach at the right, draped in a mass of tangled

rigging was the Sayonara. Steve groaned as he gazed at it.

Where there had been a mound of coral rock there was now a shallow depression. Markham had moved to another resting place!

Steve looked up at Lois. The belt was cutting cruelly into her tender body, and she twisted with the pain of it. With the pain of stiffened muscles that made him curse aloud, he worked his way up to her and slid the belt down around the trunk. By slow movements, an inch or two at a time he lowered her to the ground. As he unbuckled the belt she sank to the sand with a little "Oh" of relief. While she rested for the moment, he turned toward the Sayonara. Even from the distance at which he stood he could see that the staunch little schooner was totally disabled. There was a gaping hole in her bottom that Steve knew was beyond any attempt at repair that could be made on the island.

The outlook was not comforting. Months might pass before even a pearling schooner or a

Malay trader passed within signaling distance of the island. Markham had stayed there two years. That was in the days when ships chose the channel that lay outside the outer reef, but now, with the coming of the steamers, the lanes lay far to the west. He turned again to Lois and helped her to her feet. Together they walked toward the schooner. They had no definite purpose in going to the *Sayonara*. It represented the only thing left them from the outer world, and they gravitated toward it as one does toward a former habitation. To them it was the only home they knew on the island. It had been their home for weeks. On it they would find the things with which to build quarters on the island, but they were prisoners.

The hard beaten sand made walking easy and Lois, though stiff and sore, swung along bravely and even attempted a wan smile. She noted Steve's lacerated forearms where the sharp splinters had left their mark. She noted that he

was forcing himself ahead and she made up her mind to be brave for his sake.

They were just passing a pile of twisted paumotus that lay in their path, when Steve looked down at her face and caught the wan half smile. It stiffened him and he came to know the fortitude of woman.

As Steve looked into her eyes he saw them open wide in horror. He turned to follow their terrified gaze. Lois stopped, frozen at what she saw. It was her father's new resting place. With the wild scream of sudden madness Lois shrieked "Father!" and burst into hysterical laughter. Steve was petrified.

She sank to the ground with weakness and tried to crawl toward the body of her father. Steve ran to her and raised her to her feet. As she regained her feet she turned to him still laughing in her insane frenzy and Steve recoiled in horror. Then without warning she sprang at him. She struck and bit and tore to try to kill him and Steve was unable to defend himself,

afraid of hurting her. Her shrieks chilled him to the bone. He wanted to run away for the sight of Lois' madness unnerved him. He shook her off but she was upon him again like a wild cat. Then a great revulsion of feeling came over him. Choking out "Lois girl, forgive me," he drew his heavy forearm back and struck her on the chin.

She clung to him a fraction of a moment, then, like a broken tiger lily slid from his arms and lay quiet at his feet. Steve staggered away and sat down upon a fallen log, his head between his hands. Despair, black as night enveloped him.

Steve sat for the moment in miserable contemplation. Lois must be taken care of. He feared for her reason, and it came to him that should she receive another such shock, it might be gone forever. Rising he went to her and gathered her in his arms. He carried her, head and feet hanging limp, to the schooner where he laid her gently on the sand in the lee of the wreck. The sudden short arm blow had stopped

the tired brain dead in it's vagaries, and she lay like one asleep. Her clothing, twisted and torn, was wrapped tightly about her. They accentuated her frail appearance, and Steve's heart went out to her without reserve at that moment.

It came to him, that without her, life was not worth the living. Her dark hair, loosened by the tearing storm of the night before, lay spread beneath her head and brought into strong relief the translucent bluish pallor, the dark hollows beneath her eyes though her face was untroubled in it's repose. Her brain was having a complete, an absolute rest.

Steve was not of the religious turn of mind, but as he stood there, a tatter clothed figure, showing bronze amid the rents, he raised his head and gazed beyond the sky. His lips moved but he uttered no sound. He called to Him to give her strength to recover and plead that he might be the one to suffer and not she. As the numbed nerves lost the effect of the blow, the facial

muscles relaxed slightly, and the drawn expression faded from Lois' face.

Steve looked again at the still figure. She seemed to smile and though it was but her face resuming its wonted softness, it seemed to Steve to be an answer to his prayer.

A blue-veined marble figure whose face was ineffably sweet and a bronze statue that stood above her and which seemed to say, not with the lips, the face, but rather by its attitude, "He, with me will save you. Alone I cannot."

* * * * *

Steve clambered over the low rail of the *Sayonara* and looked around him at the wreckage of her rigging. Shrugging his shoulders, he went below. Going directly to Lois' cabin he found that, though things were thrown around in wild confusion, it was habitable though the sloping deck made walking hard. As he dropped to the sand again beside the silent figure of the girl, she stirred slightly and rolled over on her side. Her stupor had given way to sleep. He

lifted her gently and she opened her eyes with a little expression of wonderment. Her lips formed some unuttered word, then she snuggled like a tired child to his breast. There had been no look of recognition in her eyes. Her memory had ceased to function. He strode to the low side of the *Sayonara*, lifted her feet over the rail, raising her up to a sitting position upon it and held her there with one hand while he swung himself up with the other.

Then he carried her below. When he laid her on her berth, she murmured "Daddy, I want a drink." Steve went and got it for her from the butts upon the deck. When he raised her head to help her drink, she took a little swallow, smiled sweetly at him, saying "Thank you, Daddy." A moment later she sank into a profound slumber.

He went on deck and sat down to smoke and think. He was tired and stiff. Abominably so.

He was hungry too, but he was too done in to want to put up with the pain the getting of the food would cost him. He would wait until he

felt better before eating—he told himself.

It came to him that Lois would need fresh clothing and clean linen. He wondered how long she would be ill, and the thought of it and the details of her care that were entailed, worried him. It was his duty, but it was disconcerting. Her mind was gone, maybe she would never know, well, things had to be done.

“Yes” he murmured “I must care for her.” Blackton came to his mind and he wondered dully where he was. “He must have perished in the storm with the rest of the men,” he told himself. The thought gave him comfort.

Then he went to her trunk where it lay overturned. The water, that had sloshed around the floor, had soaked it's contents, and lying in a heap were many garments that had hung on the wall. He looked at the trunk a long moment before opening it. Somehow he thought she wouldn't like to have him, a man, pawing over all the little things, the intimate things, she wore. Then, after the realization that everything must

be washed and dried before they could be worn, he swung the lid and scooped up the tangled sodden clothing in a wad and strode to the deck.

There he rigged a line and hung them out. There were curious silky things among them; Things so sheer and delicate that Steve handled them in fear that he would tear them. As he marveled at their texture, he compared it to the texture of the girl there below, the while feeling somehow a traitor and that he was taking a liberty with her, herself. When he had hung the last dainty thing he turned and sat down upon a tin bucket that lay in the scuppers, his feet stretched up the sloping deck, his back against the rail. He watched the garments flutter in the evening breeze for a moment, then rose and sat down again. This time his back was to them.

The sun was nearing the zenith when Steve rose from his seat upon the deck. He was hungry. His hunger warned him that Lois needed food and he went to the little galley to

prepare a meal for her. While the water was heating for her tea he tiptoed to her cabin.

Lois was still asleep so he left her, and went again to the galley. He prepared food for her, and soon stepped on the sloping deck with a tray of dishes. He entered the little cabin and placed the tray upon the bunk beside her. Then he called her gently and she awakened slowly, languidly and without interest. Indicating the tray with a movement of his arm, he told her that she must eat something. Her eyes followed the gesture and she tried to rise to her elbow, but the effort was too much, and she sank back to the pillow too weak to aid herself.

He was beside her on the instant, and sitting beside her, her head resting on his shoulder. she ate the spoonfuls he gave her.

The tea brightened her perceptibly, but she did not know him for himself. When she could eat no more, she turned her face away from the spoon and snuggled down to him, her face hidden beneath his hard brown arm and his breast.

“Darling Daddy,” she murmured.

Steve’s eyes hardened. He reconstructed what must have happened that terrible evening that now seemed ages ago, when her father had gone ashore and found the box. He remembered the little grave in Java, in the churchyard in Batavia and the mournful notes of the “*gamelan*”* that someone played just over the cemetery wall.

He looked down at the little brown head that nestled on his breast, and the chestnut hair brushed lightly against his cheek. Supplanting the steely glint in Steve’s eyes came one of great softness and an infinite pity.

He pressed his lips into the tangled riot of her hair, and held them there for minutes. Then he laid her back upon the pillow and stroked her forehead, his hard brown hand as gentle as a woman’s.

“I’m so comfy, Daddy.” Steve bent low to catch the words.

**Gamelan*. A series of tuned gongs.

“Yes, little girl, I’m your daddy now.” He opened the porthole to give her air.

Lois fell asleep again with a contented little sigh. Her lips moved as she drifted into slumber. “I love you, Daddy.”

* * * * *

Blackton awakened from a heavy sleep to find Atel sitting upright looking at him in fond reverence. The old women who were the servants of the priest, had placed at the entrance of the sacred chamber, food for the bride of Hui early the evening before. Atel had brought it to her lord and awaited his awakening. He smiled at her and ate the fruits she offered him with relish. There were mangoes and ripe pisang, papaya and succulent mersoes. As he ate he drew her to him and she fed him with childish pleasure. He became enthralled with her wondrous beauty and he wished that he could keep her always. The thought came that this was a woman of the islands and that her beauty would fade quickly

as does a sun-burned flower and he frowned. Atel saw the heavy brows knit and pressed a velvet hand upon the wrinkled forehead. He smiled at the action and kissed her.

“When she fades I can easily lose her,” he told himself. He looked at his watch and noted with surprise the hour. It was long past daybreak. He looked about undecided as to what to do. “Yes” he murmured, “He would take her with him. They could keep to the cover of the jungle till they gained the shore and with her once on board the *Sayonara*, he would be safe from the natives. He had done the same thing in times before. Many were the women he had taken from their island homes only to be cast off when they lost their charm.” Rising, he took her by the hand and lead her toward the entrance passage. As they threaded their way down the corridor there came the murmur of muffled voices and Blackton stopped to listen. There came to him the sound of weeping.

The people were in the outer cavern where they

had taken refuge from the storm. The men had gone to the kampong in the early morning and had brought back the news of the ruin of the village. Loud was the wailing of the women for their homes were gone.

Blackton listened in wonderment then turned to retrace his steps. If discovered in the sacred precincts of the God's abode he knew death to be the penalty. "There must be some other way out of the place" he spoke aloud. He followed the twisting corridor until he came to a shallow stream that burred its way out of a crevice in the solid rock. He remembered the rivulet that he had crossed outside the mountain on his way from the beach. "It must be the same stream" was his conclusion. He stepped into the water and with Atel close behind made his way downward. Soon he saw a round spot of white ahead and he pushed hurriedly on. They emerged on the other side of the mountain from the beach and Blackton recoiled at what he saw. He was dumbfounded. Where tall palms had reared

their stately heads was a chaos of twisted desolation. The jungle was leveled as far as he could see. Only here and there the stripped skeletons of a giant tapang or makeo tree.

His startled gaze turned to the coast line and far down the beach lying high out of the water he saw the wreck and tangled rigging of the Sayonara. Blackton nearly choked with rage. Forgetting Atel in his anger and anxiety, he broke into a dead run toward the schooner. Atel did not understand but followed close behind. Blackton leaped upon a mass of fallen palm trunks that lay in his way. As his weight came upon them they settled slightly, then with a loud crackling roar the whole mass dropped from underneath him. He disappeared in the fallen mass of tree trunks with a scream of mortal terror.

Atel who had fallen a short distance behind, stopped at the edge of the chasm. Yawning blackly below her was a great crevasse in the forefoot of the mountain. She gazed wide eyed

below her and something moving caught her eye. It was Blackton struggling in a great tangle of palm fronds and rattan creepers that had broken his fall. With the agility of a chamois Atel clambered down the precipitous wall of the chasm to aid him. When she finally worked her way to where he lay, Blackton was in a dead faint. The fall had wrenched his spine and he had fainted with the pain of it. Atel fell to constructing a platform of palm fronds over which she placed others to form a shelter from the blazing sun.

When Blackton regained consciousness she half dragged, half lifted him to the shelter. He swooned again with the pain the moving cost him. There passed many days with Blackton in fevered anguish. Atel nursed him with the juices of jungle plants. She rubbed his back with the medicines of the people which she gathered from the forests. She gathered fruits and cocoanuts which supplied both food and drink and through it all bore Blackton's growing abuse

of her with patient tolerance. In her savage ignorance Blackton was the God. Atel had not heard of the coming of the schooner. Only once had she seen men of another tribe and those men had dark skins. No white man had visited the island in all her eighteen years except Markham and the men that had rescued him. These she had not seen for she was very young.

Blackton became brutal toward her, blaming her for his mishap. To scale the almost vertical walls of the crevasse was, he knew, impossible, until his sprained back mended.

* * * * *

To the westward of the island slowly working from pearling bed to pearling bed, a fleet of luggers lay at anchor. It was the time of their yearly cruise among the smaller islands. When their bins were full of shell they would sail for Singapore and civilization.

* * * * *

The days passed on leaden feet for Steve. Lois greeted him with childlike simplicity when

he went to her to bring her food or to care for her. Her body regained it's strength but memory refused to return and Steve began to despair of it's ever coming back. He gloated over the fact of her growing strength and of the healthful rose bloom that was slowly tinging her lips and rounded cheeks but her lack of memory worried him.

He built two palm leaf shacks in a clearing at the edge of the jungle, using spars and fittings from the schooner for the framework against the time when she should be well enough to move. Meanwhile he cared for her with the tenderness of his love and the impersonal attention of a trained nurse.

Passed the days. Lois remained below. Each morning he went to her and carried her across the saloon to the other cabin and fresh bed clothing after he had sponged her. To her he was,—“Daddy.”

* * * * *

In the crevasse of the mountain side Blackton

slowly recovered. He was able to sit up now and amused himself with Atel though at times he became morose at the enforced inactivity. At these times he became increasingly brutal in his treatment of her and she would leave him to climb the perilous chasm wall to search for choice jungle fruits with which she tried to lure him from the grip of his ill-temper. Many of these offerings were washed with the salt tears his brutality caused her.

* * * * *

Came the morning that Steve went to Lois and found her sitting bolt upright staring at him as he entered the cabin door. He had a clean washed night-gown in his hand.

As Steve gazed into her eyes, he saw that reason had returned. He also saw that she knew. No word was spoken. They just looked at one another. Co-mingled in her eyes was everything that a woman who loves can express through those windows of her soul. Before that look, Steve felt like a mischievous boy caught in re-

pairing some wrong before discovery. Before the gratitude, the trust, the infinite love that look carried, he colored to the roots of his hair. His embarrassment was absolute.

Gently she spoke to him.

“Steve,” she said, “Come here.” He went to her. “Bend over.” He bent over her. Placing one soft arm around his neck to lift herself and one hand upon his cheek, she pressed her lips to his and murmured “Dear, good Steve.” Then she pushed him from her and as he straightened said, tremulous with feeling, “I remember everything, and you dear, big minded boy, I know everything. Bring me all my clothes, Steve.” Steve brought them. She received them where he placed them, at the foot of the bunk in silence, and he turned to go, closing the door behind him.

“What is it, Miss Lois,” he answered through the closed door of the cabin.

“What is it, Lois,” she answered. Steve hesitated, then answered “What is it, Lois?”

“That’s better” came from within, “you forgot something.”

Steve turned and went to the other cabin. There was a pink something lying on the floor there, that he had dropped and he colored again. He picked it up, and with it doubled in his fist, crossed the saloon, knocking on Lois’ door. “Come in, Steve.” Steve entered. Lois saw what it was he carried, and it was her turn to color. Her face became suffused and Steve’s face was a picture. Lois was the first to recover speech, and she said, “I didn’t mean that, Steve, I meant this.” She held up her lips to be kissed, gazing into his eyes radiant with love of him. He bent over her again, and their lips met, while her hand stroked the hair back from his forehead. He wanted to crush her to him, to take into his arms this heart of his desire, and fondle her, but it flashed upon him that she was far from well, and that now her gratitude and the stress she had been under, had warped her judgment. He gently un-twined the arms that

clasped him to her and rose. He bent down as he turned to go and kissed her on the forehead.

Into that kiss went all the feeling that was in him, and there rose from the Gethsemane of Java a spirit that spoke a benediction over them, and Steve felt it's presence. Then he went and closed the door as before. As he closed it, he heard her speak.

“Are you going on deck, Steve?”

“Yes, Lois.”

“Then leave the door open, I'm suffocating.”

He opened it, and hooked it there, then he went on deck.

Lois sat upright, turning over in her mind the events of the last few moments. She still felt the pressure of that soul kiss upon her brow and she felt that somehow that kiss was a holy one. She looked down at her feet where the pink something lay. She drew it to her. Somehow the two things seemed to merge into one—the kiss and the sheer pink garment.

She remembered the burning face that had

looked down into hers, and the brown fist that had tried to hide what it held. Into the picture came two others; a bare-headed boy beside a newly made grave in Java, and a patch of milk white sand with a low mound of mossy coral rocks. As she folded the wisp of silk, smoothing out the wrinkles automatically as she did so, she tried to remember what had happened after landing near the mound. There seemed to have been a storm, but she was not quite sure. Memory failed her from that time until the time that she was dimly conscious of someone nursing her. Then, it had seemed to be Daddy, but now, just this morning, with the clearing of her reason it had burst upon her that he had passed beyond, and that Steve had been the one to care for her. Big, hard, soft, Steve. Steve, who had, he must have, performed the most intimate of services for her, and he blushed like an embarrassed girl at a very little thing.

When she had awakened, she reconstructed all these things. She was just summing them all

up when he had entered to change her nightgown. Without asking herself why, or really being conscious of the fact, her heart, which, up to then, had gone to him only in pity, went to him fully, unreservedly. It went to him in love, reverence and adoration. She had become in those moments, not Lois Markham, but Steve's woman.

Utterly his to hold upon the pinnacle her instinct told her she stood upon, or to possess and to damn eternally. These things were no part of thoughts, they just were. She wanted to possess him.

With the realization that she belonged to him, they came as the dower of all nature—co-given with the heart. Lois was at that moment as incapable of carnal thought as when she drew her first breath. This new desire held no passion. There was no thought that stained the purity of her mind. It was the something that the good women reserves for one. The desire to have that one crushed to her, become a part of her.

The instinctive mothering desire to mother that one, to perpetuate him among mankind. The desire that may transform the red blotch-faced oft-polluted bar-maid to a Madonna.

“Steve,” she called.

He rose from his seat on the deck, and went to her.

* * * * *

After he had left her, after that long pressure of his lips upon her brow, Steve had been busy with himself. Lois and her gratitude filled his mind. Long before, he knew he loved her. Long before, he knew that without her Life was not worth the living. He pictured himself in her position and from the viewpoint of a man, saw in Lois' demonstration of her love, only gratitude. His heart hungered within him to tell her, to lay his heart at her little feet, but his blind judgment told him “No!”

The mental strain she had endured, the physical strain that had, he told himself, unpoised her sense of proportion, made her call upon him for

care and protection, even from herself, the paramount duty. His love must wait. It must be answered in kind and not with gratitude, involving the gift of self. That could never be complete. It could never be complete unless the soul went with it. "First," he told himself, "It was pity, then gratitude." Love was unrecognized, and behind it all the shadow of mutual desire. A sapphire lagoon that could become black as the Styx itself.

"Yes, in the lagoon there lives a shadow," he told himself. It was with this thought in mind that he went to Lois when she called him.

As Steve entered, Lois' eyes that were raised to watch his coming, fell. The color in her face slowly heightened as she groped for words. She raised her face to him, and in answer to his questioning look, held out her arms to him.

"What is it, Lois, girl?" he asked, going to her. Her eyes, great luminous pools of love, spoke to him in eloquent language, but he did not fully understand.

Her heart was full, and the words fell from her trembling lips ill chosen in the spontaneity.

“I—my whole life belong to you, Steve, take me!”

Her appeal overpowered him, and he sank beside her on the bunk and crushed her to him, burying his face in her hair. Lois clung to him trembling, her face transfigured. Then he remembered those words. “My whole life belongs to you, Steve, take——” and that presence he had sensed only a few moments before, hovered near again. He saw in a vivid flash a girl, this girl, rise from her seat at the saloon table and cross to comfort him, a clipping falling from her hand. He saw a tortured lily lying on the sand near the still form of her Daddy, and he thought of the black shadow that might enter this, the Lagoon of his Desire.

His face raised from the perfume of her hair, with lips moving in unuttered prayer of thanksgiving, for the Presence that had come to

strengthen him. He laid her back upon the pillow and kissed her full upon the lips.

This time he closed the cabin door behind him as he left her.

Steve had finished the preparation of her breakfast and was placing it upon the tray, when a light step sounded behind him. Looking up, he saw outlined against the blazing sky, fully dressed and smiling, Lois standing in the doorway. "Now that I'm myself again," she said, "I must dismiss you from my province." Steve smiled in turn saying, jokingly, "Who's boss around here, tell me that?"

Archly smiling, Lois stepped into the galley and leaning close to him whispered "You are!" Steve dropped the fork that he was holding and straightened up to his fullest height. In mock severity, he ordered her away.

"Get out of here instantly or I'll——!"

"What?" she queried.

"I don't know, you little witch," he answered lamely.

Lois turned to hide a happy face. Her eyes swept the little galley, taking in its details.

“Oh! what a dirty place!” was her next. “It’s a wonder we’re not poisoned. Now, I know that I will do the cooking. After breakfast, Mister Boss, we will clean this place up.” She looked at him, her eyes dancing. Like most galleys on small schooners, things were untidy, and carefully swept into a corner behind the wood box was a pile of sweepings.

In that pile was the accumulation of a week’s disorder. Steve looked at her in plaintive helplessness.

“You priceless thing,” she said, “I never saw a man yet, that could keep house.” Steve grinned shamefacedly. Then seriously continuing, Lois softly said:

“But, Steve, there is one thing you can keep and always will.”

Steve said nothing to this. He just looked at her, waiting to hear what she would say.

“The love and honor of woman.” Lois ex-

tended her hand. He grasped it, his eyes searching deeply into hers. He raised the white hand to his lips, and held it there, his eyes holding hers for a long moment. She gently withdrew the hand. There was an interval of strained silence. In that moment, as clearly understood as if they had spoken in agreement, there was a covenant made. Each understood. Each came to know that they were for each other. Each realized that, here, alone, their love was impossible. Lois' lips trembled and her eyes grew moist. His voice, husky with pent up feeling, broke the silence.

“Lois, I have loved you with my soul since the night I told you of my sister. Life without you, holds nothing for me.” He paused while Lois hung upon his words in rapturous ecstasy. Oh, he did love her—he did—he did! She sang it to herself, half suffocating with the joy of it. He continued. “I can offer you nothing but that love, and these——.” He extended his hands.

“You are my God,” she answered and threw

her arms around his neck. Again he buried his lips in the fragrance of her hair. It seemed as though he were light, light and buoyant as a sun-kist bubble, and his life was as lustrous hued as the irridescent colors on it. The very air was sweet as honeysuckle in a twilight garden.

Steve's coffee boiled over in odorous abandon, unnoticed, unheard.

* * * * *

That first breakfast over, Lois busied herself in the galley setting all to rights. She was singing.

On the beach where he had built the shacks was Steve, whistling and making ready the larger of the shacks for Lois' occupancy. The hour passed.

Steve had moved all of his and her belongings to the shacks and sat now in the shade of the schooner smoking, resting and thinking. He was planning to level the schooner and try to replank the gaping hole that yawned in her coppered bottom.

Lois, her tidying of the galley completed came on deck for a breath of air for the galley was warm.

Shielding her dazzled eyes with her hand from the glare of the shimmering beach, she gazed at the shacks in the outer fringe of the jungle. Then she spied Steve below her gazing up at her fondly.

“What did you build the two shacks for, Steve?” she queried.

“Because,” he answered.

“Oh!” was her reply.

The days passed uncounted in their happiness. Each evening arm in arm they walked to the cliffs down the beach to watch the glories of the tropic sunset. There, he fashioned a rustic bench on which daily they spent the evening hours.

* * * * *

Blackton was alone. Atel was away searching for food. He rose to his feet, though the effort cost him a little pain, and grinned. He was able,

he thought, to make the climb up the almost vertical wall that had held him prisoner. He decided to attempt it immediately upon her return. He sat down again to await her coming. Soon she appeared above him and he watched her as she made her way with lithe agility down the rocky cliff.

He ate the food she brought him, then, rising, he told her that he would try the climb. She said "No," at first, but he roughly insisted and with her assisting him, stopping to rest after the harder places, they won the top.

Stealthily they made their way along the edge of the chasm toward the sea. Suddenly Blackton stopped. Faintly drifting through the close growing thicket came the sound of music. It was Kalom, lonely, ever mourning his loss of Atel, playing the love song. Blackton motioned her to be silent. Atel stepped back upon a branch with a loud snap that echoed through the jungle. Blackton nearly choked with fear and anger. Mouthing a muffled curse he wheeled and

struck her viciously upon the mouth. Atel fell limply at his feet while he stood in silence, peering through the tangles in the direction from which the sound had come.

Without further thought of Atel from whose mouth there flowed a stream of crimson, he turned and was lost to sight in the darkness of the deepest thickets.

When the branch snapped, Kalom with the quick ear of the hunter, froze into listening silence. His ear caught the smack of the brutal blow that felled Atel. He heard her fall.

Like a panther stalking its prey he crept toward the sound, drawing his heavy cane knife as he did so.

He found Atel lying like one dead where she had fallen.

He rushed to her in a transport of fear that she was really dead and lifted her head into his arm. Slowly her eyes opened and gazed into the sloe black ones that devoured hers. She tried

to smile but her bruised lips made the poor attempt ghastly.

He begged of her to tell him what had happened and as she told him all, his mind reverted to the coming of the white men and he realized that the one she thought to be Hui must have been one of these. He helped her to her feet and led her to the kampong.

The new kampong was buried deep in the fastnesses of the jungle where the storm had not penetrated and it was in the late afternoon when Kalom led her to Maktil to demand the punishment of the white man.

Maktil heard the plea and called into council the elders of the tribe. Sitting on the ground surrounded by a circle of the warriors who voiced their rage at her seduction, the old men gave their verdict. There was only one white man on the island. He was the one who lived at the wreck upon the beach. He was the guilty one. They would go to him. They would exact just punishment. Hui, their God, must be

avenged for the despoilation of his bride. The war drums boomed as the men sought out their weapons.

Blackton, fearful of the natives, hid in the thicket until the daylight waned.

* * * * *

The sun was sinking in a blaze of ruddy glory. Lois and Steve sat silent on the rustic bench, each busy with their thoughts. Before them was the world: A flat restless deep blue, world of water. The world meant nothing to them. They meant the world to each other, but there was the Bar! It was the only rift in their lute of complete happiness. Tuned in harmony, their minds were occupied with the same thoughts. Neither thought seriously at this time of leaving the island. They were supremely happy to be alone, one with the other.

On Lois' lap there lay a book, open at the passage she had been reading. It was one of Blackton's and they had both read and re-read all of them that he had left. It was the one Steve's

sister had left on the schooner but Lois had torn the flyleaf from it and after folding it carefully placed it in her locket.

Steve's eye caught a passage on the open page that though he had read before, came to him with new meaning. He leaned over and with a gentle caress took the book from her and read the lines.

"The court finds that this woman is the common law wife of the defendant——."

Steve looked up at Lois. Her yearning eyes gazed into his lovingly. It was Steve's hour of weakness.

"Lois," he whispered, "will you be my common-law wife?"

Lois turned to look at the dying sunset. The sea was a blank of any living thing. Years might elapse before a ship would come. "Why not?" she asked herself. Each time she touched him, she thrilled. Each time she kissed him good night, she wanted to follow him to his bed, there to sit and watch him sleep, brushing back from his damp forehead the clinging curls that

framed it. Within her motherhood was calling insistently, demanding it's own.

She turned to Steve, cheeks mantling, taking his hands in hers she gazed long into his eyes. By no word or act had he ever broken trust. Her decision came.

“Yes,” she murmured.

Together they rose to return to the schooner, and the evening meal. Within the hour, night would settle over them.

The pathway led from the cliff through the thicket where her father's cabin lay in scattered ruin. Heretofore, they had always avoided this spot, but now, Lois, instead of taking the accustomed roundabout way, went, arm in arm with Steve, directly to it.

Her father's sea chest lay where he had dropped it. Lois went to it slowly and stood beside it wrapt in thought. Some unaccountable impulse prompted Steve to open it, and he lifted the lid. Scattered in musty confusion were papers, clothing and a small few boxes. Lois,

as she gazed into the damp interior, was carried back to her childhood days, and her eyes became filled with tears, her heart tender with the memory of "Daddy." Through her blurred vision she saw something in the box that arrested her attention. She bent over and picked it up. It was a tiny baby's shoe. It had been her shoe. There was another just like it in her room in Berkeley. It was one of the first pairs of shoes that she had ever worn. As she looked at the tiny thing, there came to her mind a picture of other little ones. Little ones belonging to her—and Steve. Her heart glowed with the thought of it, and she looked at Steve through her tear filled eyes with lovely tenderness.

She turned it over in her hand. Written on the sole was "Lois Markham." With the reading of the name, she was stricken with the thought, "My children's name. Oh, God! They would be born outside the Law." The shoe trembled in her nerveless hand, and she stag-



*"Steve, 'she said,' Not I, but We must
ask forgiveness of their Spirits."*

gered forward a step, Steve caught her as she broke into impassioned sobbing.

“I can’t! I can’t! I can’t!” she cried. Tensely she held to him the shoe. Steve gazed at the shapeless little wisp of leather, then she crushed it to her bosom. As Steve gazed, the shoe lost form and in her arms he seemed to see crushed to her in tenderest embrace, the pink and white form of a baby. The cry of the unborn smote into his soul that racked and quivered like a breeze awakened leaf.

“Lois,—can you ever forgive me?” Lois turned to him, her eyes brimming.

“Steve,” she said, “not I, but *WE*, must ask forgiveness of their spirits. It must come from the little ones that are to be.” She paused, then continued, “Sometime, Dear Heart, they shall come to us.”

Together they walked to her shelter where he kissed her a lingering goodnight.

* * * * *

Stealing through the jungle came the warriors

of the people lighting their way in the darkness with flaming torches.

Lois and Steve had just fallen asleep when Blackton crept like some unclean shadow from the jungle behind the place where Lois slept.

In the blackness outside the outer reef the pearling fleet drifted slowly before the sluggish breeze. They were waiting for the moonrise before they tried to pass the narrow entrance.

* * * * *

Blackton silently worked his way around the shack and peered inside through the ill fitting door. Burning, with lowered wick upon the wall, was one of the schooner's lamps. His quick eye took in the details of the interior at one searching glance. He saw Lois lying asleep upon the bunk, her hair loose around her head and as the night was warm, without covering except her thin night gown. He saw the black box upon the floor at the foot of the bunk unopened. It was that which he wanted most of all. Pushing the door inward slowly he entered and knelt

beside the box. He planned to open it and take out the contents while Lois slept.

The lock of the box was obstinate and resisted the prying of his clasp knife and he lifted it nearer to the light. As he rose to carry it to the other side of the room, Lois stirred restlessly in her sleep and one of her limbs slid from the bunk and overhung its edge.

Blackton turned at the sound and stopped. Placing the box upon the ground he went to her and sat down upon the edge of the bunk at her feet. His eyes devoured her unconscious figure, and he forgot the treasure in gloating sensual appraisal. He forgot caution. He forgot that here was a different girl. He forgot that Steve must be near. All was forgotten in the intensity of his callous desire. He bent over and the fragrance of her hair intoxicated him. Lois opened her eyes and gazed with growing terror into the suffused face that hung over her's like an odious mask of a vile doom.

Blackton saw the terror in her face and the

fear that lay behind it, but in his animal degradation ignored her feelings and slid his wanton hand over her, stroking her body in infamous abandon. Lois tried to scream but was paralyzed with fright. Then he seized her and kissed her. With the act the spell of Lois' fright was broken and her voice returned. "Steve!" she screamed.

Steve bounded from his bunk. Without stopping to open the door he hurled himself through it and in the instant dashed through the partly open door of Lois' shack.

Blackton sprang from the bunk to protect himself but Steve was on him like a man. A rat will fight when cornered and Blackton fought but in his insane fury, Steve's strength was irresistible. His fingers searched for Blackton's throat as he closed with him and they fell to the floor in a bounding, killing, thrashing embrace that smashed the chairs and table into kindling. They struggled to their feet and Blackton's head wiped the lamp from its place upon the wall. It fell beneath their feet and

Steve kicked it from him. It rolled underneath the bunk, flaming. Lois shrank against the wall in an ecstasy of terror. As she gazed in wide eyed horror at the struggle Steve's foot slipped and he fell backward dragging Blackton with him. To Lois it looked as though Blackton had overcome him and Lois fainted.

The steel fingers found Blackton's throat and tightened until Steve could feel the wind pipe close. With one despairing effort Blackton strove to break the hold but Steve's grip was inflexible. Blackton went limp. Though he still maintained his hold, Steve rose to his feet lifting Blackton's weight by the throat and striding to the doorway, caught him by the belt with the other hand, tossed him out.

In his wild excitement Steve could see nothing else but Blackton. As he turned to Lois he realized that the flames were enveloping the shack. Rushing to the bunk he gathered her clothing which had fallen from a peg in the wall at her

feet, upon her body and lifted her together with the clothing to his arms.

Steve stumbled over something that lay in his way as he went to the door of the burning shack. It was the black box. He kicked it through the open door where it fell beyond the reach of the flames. He had scarcely cleared the doorway when the heavy thatched roof fell inward to burn with volcanic violence, for the dry palm leaves went like tinder.

He gently laid Lois on the sand safely out of reach of the flames and knelt beside her, calling her name. She revived as he caressed her and threw her arms about him, drawing him to her as though to protect him, whispering endearments that filled his soul with joy.

In the jungle were the natives who had, upon seeing the fire, paused a moment in their advance. Now with wild yells they broke cover and surrounded Steve and Lois. They had come to exact vengeance for the desecration of their God.

Steve gazed at them in wonderment. In their stay upon the island he had been left severely alone by the natives and though they had kept a watch on he and Lois, he seldom saw them. He was at a loss to explain their coming.

In their midst was Atel attended by the faithful Kalom. It was he that seized Steve and dragged him toward the elders who entered the circle of the warriors with measured tread. Maktil strode to Steve and beckoned to Atel, demanding to know if he were the guilty one. Atel looked at Steve in puzzlement. This was not the heavy browed, red faced brute that had come to her in the cavern. Turning to Maktil she shook her head in silence. "He is not the one," she said. "It was another."

Just outside the circle of the firelight's glow lay Blackton. He had regained his senses. Though just about done in with the punishment he had received, he realized that here were the avengers and his end. He struggled to his hands and knees, cowering in the fitful shadows and

slowly worked his way toward the tall tapa fringing the beachline. He had nearly reached it's cover when Atel cried "It was another!" and with the words, the one remaining wall of the shack fell inward, sending into the air a mighty shower of sparks.

The beach was illumined for the instant as though with sunlight and Lois, whose mind was working with lightning rapidity from Steve's peril, caught the movement of the creeping figure of Blackton from the tail of her eye.

"Look!" she cried. "There goes the guilty one! He is escaping!"

The eyes of all were turned in Blackton's direction. A dozen warriors sprang to intercept him. He was dragged into the circle and thrown upon the ground at the feet of Atel. Blackton cowered, like a craven cur for the moment, then rising suddenly threw himself at the feet of Steve, begging him to save him.

Steve looked down at him in utter disgust but

through his mind there flashed the thought that here was a white man doomed to native torture. Richly as he knew that Blackton deserved the punishment, the thought aroused within him the protecting instinct that lives in the breasts of those of the same blood. He paused momentarily in indecision while the warriors growled at the delay. Lois read the thought in Steve's mind and her mind reverted to the fly leaf of the novel Blackton had given her. She remembered the brown hand clenched in vengeful determination that night when he told her of his sister. The leaf was hidden in the locket that she always wore upon her neck.

Lois tore the locket from its fastenings and opened it with trembling fingers, taking out the folded flyleaf.

"Steve," she cried. "Read this! I tore it from a book that Captain Blackton loaned me, weeks ago."

Steve took the white creased page from her hand and read the name, Gloria Maitland! In-

stantly he recognized the handwriting, his face leprous under it's coat of tan. The impulse came to kill Blackton then and there. He thought of Lois and the impulse strengthened, but Lois, noting the almost imperceptible swaying of his body toward Blackton as he tensed, laid a soft hand upon his arm, looking into his eyes, saying "No!"

His face lost it's rancor as he looked into her eyes and he turned away. As he turned his back Blackton screamed in tortured anguish of soul. The act he knew was the sealing of his doom.

The warriors seized him and bore him into the brooding blackness of the jungle. They carried him to the Place of the Flames. Here they found the very old men of the tribe seated in council awaiting their return.

The council circle opened to admit the warriors with Blackton. As Atel confronted him, he sank to his knees and grasping the withered garland that hung from her loins begged in an agony of despair for his life. In the heart of

Atel there was a great bitterness, and she turned from him with loathing.

It was Maktil that answered for her. "Let him live in the Labyrinth of the Dead." As the sentence was pronounced there passed before Blackton's mind the long line of those whom he had wronged. This time they seemed to say, as they pointed their shadowy fingers at him—"The cup is overflowing. Now is the time to pay."

Blackton was seized by eager hands that dragged him into a dark corridor that led downward, far below the base of the mountain. At the end of the passage an opening in the floor yawned blackly. As they gazed into the creepy darkness of the pit, the place was illumined with a green, ghostly glow of the fires of Hui, for they were very near to the crater of molten rock that boiled and blazed with the green fires of burning copper. This was the burial pit of the people. Once dropped through the opening, it was the end, for there was no way out. Blackton

caught a glimpse of what lay below. In the hot dry air of the pit, the bodies of those who had gone before had dried and shriveled until their mummy-like figures were as hard and stiff as wooden carvings.

As Blackton gazed upon that pile of dried humanity, each lying just as it had fallen, he became maudlin in his terror, and his shrieks resounded in echoing mockery through the winding channels of the place.

In his ecstasy of horror, he was powerless to move, and they lifted him frozen, inert, and dropped him through the opening. The green fires lifted in their mad dance as he fell upon the silent forms, then died slowly down to absolute blackness. Blackton's throat was choked with fear. He tried to articulate but only hoarse sounds came.

The darkness became peopled with vaporous shapes that seemed to creep slowly toward him, pointing, menacing. Then the figure of Markham, leading by the hand the nebulous form of

Gloria Maitland came from the blackness and confronted him. From Markham's head there stood the pick appallingly vivid, luridly red. As they approached him, Blackton became a raving maniac, and leaped at the apparition to destroy it. His clawing hands clutched futilely at the transparent figment of his ruined mind, and he laughed, laughed the high pitched, cracked, soul-chilling laugh of the hopeless paranoia. Like some unshriven ghoulish phantom of a churchyard, he groped his way down the winding maze of passages to become to the light of day forever lost. Hui was avenged.

The people moved in solemn file from the Place of the Dead to the fresh cool air of the outer cavern. There Kalom embraced Atel, freed from the arms of Hui by the vile desecrater of her honor. Together they left the place to find a new home far around the island where the storm had spared the cocoanuts, happy in their unexpected reunion.

Arm around her, Steve led Lois to the rustic bench that overlooked the sea. The moon was just emerging from the depths fully round and argent. It's silvery light flowed in a broad pathway to their very feet. It was as though to guide them to the east which was their home. Heads drooping one against the other they fell asleep to dream of a new day. With the moon-rise came the pearling fleet which as they crossed the white disk of the lifting moon, silently dropped their sails and came to anchor.

